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THE COCHRAN COLLECTION
OF
PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS

IT is only recently that a general interest has been taken in the wonderful art of Persian miniature painting; and as science and collecting usually go together, Dr. F. R. Martin, one of the best connoisseurs of Persian art, has just given to the public the results of his research along these lines in an authoritative publication, at the moment when the Museum has received a most generous gift of Persian manuscripts from Mr. Alexander Smith Cochran. Until recently the Museum owned only one manuscript book and a small but selected collection of single pages. From the evidence afforded by Dr. Martin's study of the best Persian artists, it seems possible to give a better attribution to the fine miniatures in this manuscript than "School of Bihzad," the one previously advanced. The book is very probably by one of the best pupils of Bihzad, Shaikh Sada, the chief painter at the Court of the Shaybanids in the middle of the sixteenth century. Among the single miniatures are works by Sultan Muhammad, Riza Abbasi, Kasim, and by some of the best decorators of book borders working in the middle of the sixteenth century.

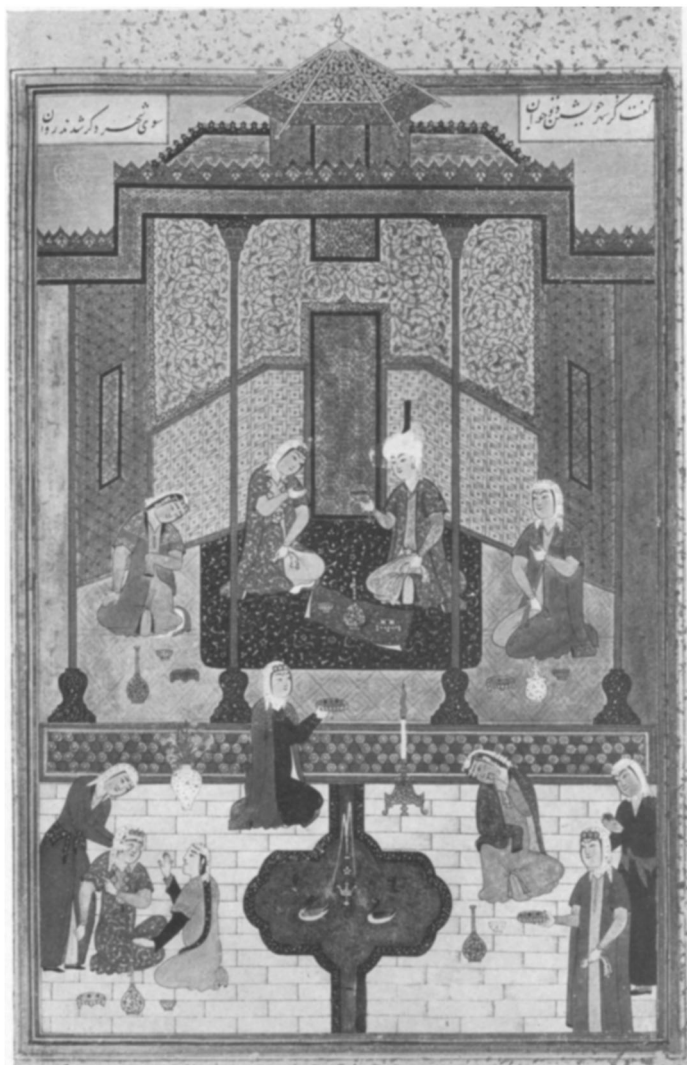
With the collection of Mr. Cochran, which consists of twenty-four manuscripts and thirty single pages, it is possible to illustrate the art of miniature painting in a much more splendid and varied exhibition, which comprises the work of the early schools as well as those of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. As Professor A. V. W. Jackson has prepared a most scientific catalogue of all the manuscripts, which will soon be published, I mention here only a few of the most interesting and beautiful works, among which are two at least which should be known to everyone who is interested in the finest creations of Near Eastern art.

The great period of the Timurids (1369-1494) is represented by a Koran copied in 1427 by Ibrahim Sultan, the grandson of Timur, a brother of Baisunghar, who was

one of the first influential bibliophiles of the Orient. These men and their father Shah Rukh, who has been called "the founder of the most elegant style of book production of Persia," created a new type of book unsurpassed as to paper, illuminations, and covers. This Koran has naturally no illustrations, but the writing and the simple borders with flowers and arabesques have the impressive, robust character of the school. An example of book illumination of this period is the Nizami of the year 1449-1450, by an artist not of great refinement, but of vigor and entertaining variety. The design shows Chinese influence, still much in the style of the earlier Mongolian miniatures of the fourteenth century. The colors appear at first profuse and almost offensive in their vividness, but a closer study shows them to be a nice expression of the artist's temperament, and not without brilliant ideas and imagination.

From the Timurid school comes the greatest Persian artist, Bihzad (about 1460 to 1525), whose career is marked by an extraordinary development in the direction of the highest refinement of line, color, and composition. The Cochran Collection contains a work of Nizami, *Haft Parikar*, which has been attributed to Bihzad by Dr. Martin on account of the signature of the artist which is found on three of the five miniatures. It is one of his earliest works, quite in the style of the Timurid school, from which some of the five miniatures have been copied even in the color scheme, as Dr. Martin points out. But how much more delicate is the drawing of the figures, how much less crowded the composition, and how clearly Bihzad's temperament and remarkable sense of observation are shown in the details! The picture of Bahram Gur and the Indian Princess in the dark palace has exquisite rhythm of line; the hunting scene shows the artist making clever use of large empty spaces in order to emphasize the most important figures and is, moreover, remarkable for the characterization of the horses, which are vivid and lifelike in spite of their somewhat stiff attitude.

The greatest treasure of the collection



BAHRAM GUR IN THE SANDAL PALACE
 BY MIRAK, DATED 1524
 FROM A MANUSCRIPT OF THE WORKS OF NIZAMI



NAUFAL THE ARAB CHIEFTAIN CHAMPIONS MAJNUN
 PERSIAN, DATED 1510
 MANUSCRIPT OF THE WORKS OF NIZAMI



ALEXANDER SURROUNDED BY HIS COURTIERS
 BY MIRAK, DATED 1524
 FROM A MANUSCRIPT OF THE WORKS OF NIZAMI

however, is a Nizami manuscript with fifteen miniatures illuminated by Mirak, the contemporary and pupil of Bihzad, "the Carpaccio of the East" as he has been called, the founder of the Bokhara school. The manuscript, which is dated 1524, was in the library of the Shah of Persia, and then for some time was owned by Dr. Martin, who writes of it in the highest terms. "The manuscript is second to none of the period. There are certainly larger ones in existence, but none of finer quality, with such a profusion of architecture and such charming coloring; furthermore, it is in perfect condition and in a splendid contemporary binding." The book contains the complete works of Nizami, and the five poems of which they are composed are characterized by different-colored paper for each poem. With fine discrimination the color is always chosen to harmonize with the color scheme of the miniatures. Especially beautiful are the different views in the Palaces which Prince Bahram Gur visits when calling on the seven daughters of the seven rulers of the world. These subjects, which demanded a different color scheme for each miniature

to correspond with the different colors of the palaces, black, yellow, green, and so forth, have always been among the favorite problems of the Persian painters, but never has higher decorative value been given to these illustrations than by Mirak in this Nizami in which the hue of the walls in the different palaces is the motive upon which is built up an exquisite symphony of color.

The Indian miniaturists, who began by imitating Persian art and were then influenced by European painters, are well represented in the Cochran Collection by a large number of single sheets, two of which are reproduced in color in Dr. Martin's book, the portrait of Shah Jahan on horseback and of Jahangir when young visiting a holy man. In these and a number of landscapes with figures the general composition is seldom equal to that of the best Persian miniatures, but the single portraits, and in fact every detail which is copied directly from nature, show a remarkable observation and are executed in a most minute and often very decorative technique.

W. R. V.